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ABSTRACT

Two overarching tasks face school public relations directors. These tasks are gaining public support for education and fostering understanding and acceptance of the professions of school public relations. Both are difficult. Schools today suffer from a lack of public confidence. School public relations suffers from a lack of understanding by the public. This lack of understanding may be partially because those who promote school public relations are called by at least eleven different names, from information specialists to directors of public relations. To begin to solve these problems, it is important to remember that public relations directors are more than just communicators; they are societal technicians applying knowledge of the social sciences to bring about high level adjustments between the public and public school education. This can be called the "engineering of consent" and can be accomplished by concentrating on eight areas: (1) defining immediate, intermediate, and long-range goals, (2) researching the publics with whom adjustments are being made, (3) reorienting goals if necessary, (4) deciding on strategies, including how to use the "four Ms"--mind power, manpower, mechanics, and money, (5) determining appropriate themes and appeals for the publics involved, (6) getting organized, (7) timing and planning tactics, and (8) making a budget. (Author/JM)

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KINGSLEY MEMORIAL LECTURE DELIVERED VIA VIDEOTAPE BY EDWARD L. BERNAYS, JULY 11, 1978 AT THE 25TH NSPRA NATIONAL SEMINAR, PORTLAND, OREGON.

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E.L. Bernays

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

EA 011 039

My wife and I are delighted to be here. I am honored to give the Kingsley Lecture, to follow such distinguished predecessors. My relations with your association have reached their majority. Twenty-one years ago, you accepted a public relations library from us still functioning with titles greatly increased. I greatly enjoy my relations with you director John H. Wherry, wise and dedicated. He recognizes the vital importance of education to the United States. He uses sound public relations methods to solve education's public relations problems and those of your profession.

Your many problems are due to the speeded up world we live in, changed by revolutions in technology, communications and transportation. Life is more complex than when my wife and I started the new profession of public relations over five decades ago. The One World of dependence and interdependence Wendell Willkie envisaged is closer. In this new world, public education is possibly the most basic component. The right education of free men and women ensures continuity of the democratic society, dedicated to ideals of freedom, equality and orderly justice. If you solve the public relations problems of public education and those of your profession you solve the problems of tomorrow's society.

I shall today discuss these two problems with you and provide two blue prints for action to meet your two interrelated problems.

As to the first: Public education presents an immense problem. The Wall Street Journal stated recently that U.S. public school spending will reach one hundred billion dollars annually by 1982, up nineteen billion from this year. Enrollment today is forty three point six million students, about twenty-five percent of the American people, one in four of the entire population.

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A recent membership survey revealed your own appraisal of public education public rleations problems-general lack of public confidence in the public school system, finances, declining test scores, discipline, adjustment to desegregation, alternative education, shifting U.S. population patterns, obsolescent buildings, career and vocational education and mandatory education.

Widespread national public visibility is given your public relations problems. The recent passage of California's proposition 13 is but one of many such manifestations. But public visibility apparently leaves the public unconcerned about making public education the constructive instrument is should be. Public education is neglected by the public, its elected and selected policy and decision makers. It should of course be of primary concern to all, leaders and followers. An educated understanding citizenry is essential to deal with increasingly complex issues at the ballot box and in the court of public opinion. Public education must be of the highest order. The whole society must support it in vocal and monetary expression. You, the members of the National School Public Relations Association, play an important role in ensuring this sound goal.

As to the second problem I shall discuss, your own public relations problems as a profession, you will agree that your ability to function depends on your support from school systems and public alike. Today everyone knows what medical doctors, lawyers, accountants, are and do. You and your work suffer from passionate anonymity among school systems and public alike. Mr. Wherry tells me you are called by eleven different terms. Possibly that is one reason. You are directors of communications, directors of public information, directors of school community relations, special project coordinators, special assistants to the superintendent,

public affairs directors, publications administrators, administrative assistants, communication editors, information specialists and occassionally as directors of public relations.

I shall try to outline how you can gain support for your professional activity, gain acceptance for your activity from school administrators and public alike, so that you will be better able to carry our your important mandate and achieve the values that come with public recognition acceptance and support.

The very name of your organization with the words public relations clearly part of it validates this approach.

Now let us first define public relations, so we know that we understand each other. Meanings of words in the United States are as fragile as lace and soap bubbles. In France this is not the case. The French Academy defines the meanings of words. Words are not obfuscated in meaning by unrelated situations that change meanings in this country. Public relations has suffered badly in this respect. Today so-called practitioners of public relations can call themselves that, though they have no qualifications to do so. Doctors and lawyers are licensed and registered by the state on the basis of education, training, and character. The state defines meanings.

Public relations covers relations of a unit with the publics on which it depends for viability. Public relations practitioners advise on how to bring relations for viability. Public relations practitioners advise on how to bring relations to highest points of adjustments. First research finds out adjustments and maladjustments between publics and the unit's objectives. Then the public relations practitioner advises on changes of attitude and action of unit, as indicated by the research. Then practitioner advises on informing and persuading relevant publics to accept and support unit and its objectives.

As public relations director of your school system you function on a two-way street. You are a societal technician applying knowledge of the social sciences to bring about adjustments at highest level between your publics and public school education of a high order. You are not merely a communicator of words, distributing them to media to gain public visibility.

You advise your school system of misconceptions, ignorance, apathy or wisdom of their publics. You advise your chiefs of policies or practices at variances with sound educational policies or programs. I shall discuss this subject later. You interpret the school system to the public, strengthen favorable attitudes, negate negative ones, convert those on the fence to support.

Good public relations advice to your chief should bring about the highest degree of adjustment between the school system and the publics on which it depends. Said in another way, you are fulfilling the social responsibilities of the school system. You are also functioning in an ancillary capacity, interpreting the school system to the public.

I call the methods by which you accomplish these two goals the engineering of consent.

Eight principles govern this approach. They apply to both your goals:

1. Define your goals.
2. Research your publics.
3. Reorient your goals if research shows they are unattainable.
4. Decide on strategy in the light of your research-how you will use your available resources of the four M's--mind power, manpower, mechanics, and money.
5. Fixing on themes and appeals to your publics.

6. Organization.

7. Timing and planning of tactics.

8. Making a budget.

Let us apply these principles to your problem of public school education. 1) Goals: Spell out goals for your school system for three time periods; immediate, intermediate, and long time. Make them specific. Forget generalities like "better education." Put down what public education attempts to accomplish in your system in understandable terms, what you are aiming at in tangible and intangible terms from abstractions about goals of education to money, buildings, numbers of students, teachers, students per teacher.

It might be helpful in this connection for your association to define with the cooperation of outstanding educators, what the goals of public education are. Such a pronouncement arrived at after study and deliberation would serve as a great aid of public education and to you on a local basis.

Such a statement would also clarify the objectives for school systems that need such direction. It would build goodwill for your association and help in your task of bringing about adjustment between publics and school systems at the highest level.

2) Research: Research of the public will ascertain if your goals are realistic and how to attain them if they are. Research will show you how to win support for them. The attitudes and motives of publics involved, what public ignorance, apathy or wisdom towards your goals are. The Ropers, Harrises, Gallups and other top professionals are available. But if you don't have the furds to engage them, carry out research with volunteers. You can enlist professors of public opinion research at your local university to become members of your advisory committee or

call on high school or college volunteers to assist you. Enlighted Americans want to further public education.

3) Reorientation of goals. If research indicates that your goals are impossible to reach for any number of reasons, reorient your goals to conform to reality.

4) Strategy. Strategy, different from tactics, covers planning of how and in what combinations to utilize resources of mindpower, manpower, mechanics and money. Effective strategy makes the most of effective use of your resources.

5) Themes and appeals. These stem from research. Must meet the motives of your publics. Self preservation, amibition, pride, love of family and children, the life wish, the desire to be a leader and a follower are representative motives. Themes and appeals are directed to individuals, groups, subgroups and overall publics. They may be made singly or in combination. They need reiteration. They can be projected to the public through the written, spoken and printed word, validated by authority, factual evidence, reason, persuasion and tradition.

6) Organization. This includes your personnel in and outside your office. Very often you can broaden your organization by enlisting volunteers in your effort.

7) Planning and timing of tactics. Your researchers and your fulfillment of the principles of the engineering of consent up to this point makes it possible to plan tactics. Make up three charts for planning and timing of tactics, one for the immediate, another for the intermediate and a third for the long time period. Your first column in each will mark time by months and weeks. Your other columns will list by categories the activities to be carried on in the time periods.

One column will be devoted to conferences you will hold, another to contacts with group leaders and opinion molders, another to letters, contacts with media, personal conferences.

Obviously your intermediate and longtime charts are subject to change if dramatic change takes place. But changes in the United States are usually gradual.

8) Budget. Even with inflation, anticipated expenses for office, executive and administrative out of pocket moneys can be planned in advance for the three time periods.

An engineering approach of this kind should aid you in the meeting your problems.

Now as to your own problem as a profession. You apply the same eight principles of the engineering of consent to yourself. Public relations strategies and tactics that are sound for your principal are equally effective for you and work you are doing.

As to objectives, it would seem to me this would be to gain the status of other activities which have the understanding and support of your community--medical doctors and accountants for instance. Your national association can aid you in this by defining your activity as directors of public relations and gaining acceptance for its definition among the group leaders and opinion molder who shape public opinion, among the media, the dictionaries, books on education, professional associations.

As to research, this too could be carried on by your association and by yourself. You may not be able to engage a professional pollster make a survey of your standing in your community. But your best friend can easily make a high spot survey of your standing within the school community and outside it. This will give you an indication of what people think or say about your profession, your activity, and you.

It will give you opportunity to intensify favorable attitudes, convert those on the fence to understanding and provide you with false or prejudiced impressions to negate.

Reorientation of goals. Your personal survey plus the association one will help you to reorientate your goals and plan your proposed activity.

Strategy. You will have to be the determinant of how much of your free time to spend on your effort and decide on changes of attitude and action you will need to make to get across the basic objectives.

Themes and appeals. These stem from the research. But it is safe to say that the strategy will evolve around presentation through all means of the reasons for your function, its definition to group leaders and opinion molders, your association with recognized functions in the community such as presence on boards of human service organization even daisies at important meetings related to the general welfare. Recognition by authority for your work is not unimportant.

Organization. Obviously organization will be yourself. You can allocate part of your free time daily to give to the work, whether it be attending a meeting of a social service board of which you are a member or writing a letter explaining your function to a medium that has indicated ignorance of your functions or a letter of commendation to a medium that has indicated understanding; timing and planning of tactics. You can prepare charts for your immediate, intermediate and long-time approach as I have suggested you do for your public education problems

There is, of course, a problem of everyone, but the chief executive in an organization keeping what is euphemistacally called a low profile in your activity. That may well be a problem for careful consideration. But in a free competitive society, do not let your personal modesty deter you from carrying on sound legitimate activities to gain for

acceptance of your vocation and for you the reputation basic to effectively carrying on your work, particularly when your public today may be ignorant of what you are doing in its interest.

A last thought. Keep in touch with the professional literature, write your association and that of the broad field of public relations. You don't have to be Magellans and Columbuses in what you do. Apply your creativity where the Magellans and Columbuses in your field left off.

Edward L. Bernays